



The Anti-Roma Europe: Modern ways of disciplining the Roma body in urban spaces

A Europa Anti-Roma: Formas modernas de disciplina do corpo Roma nos espaços urbanos

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Resumo

Este artigo examina os desafios de conceptualizar as experiências dos povos Roma numa Europa Anti-Roma no enquadramento dos direitos humanos, a segurança interna e as políticas de "integração". O artigo foca-se na política de racismo quotidiano anti-roma e o racismo estrutural e os seus efeitos traumáticos na população Roma na Europa. Utiliza-se a definição de "racismo quotidiano" de Philomena Essed, enquanto práticas, atividades e atitudes rotineiras que são aceites num dado sistema. A noção de racismo estrutural refere-se a governabilidades racializadas e ideologias/epistemologias que reproduzem relações de poder assentes no privilégio/supremacia branca. Neste sentido, o racismo reproduz a desumanização para a manutenção da branquitude como fundamento da soberania do estado.

Palavras-chave: Estado permanente de exceção; Racismo estrutural; Anticiganismo quotidiano.

Abstract

This article examines the challenges of conceptualizing the experiences of Roma people in an Anti-Roma Europe within a domain of what has been defined as human rights, internal security and "integration" policies. This paper focuses on the politics of structural and everyday Anti-Roma racism and its traumatic effects on the Roma people in Europe. I engage with Philomena Essed's definition of the concept of everyday racism as practices, activities and attitudes accepted in a given system. The notion of structural racism refers to racialized governmentalities and ideologies/epistemologies that reproduce power relations that are grounded on white privilege/supremacy. Accordingly, racism reproduce dehumanization for the maintenance of whiteness as state sovereignty.

Keywords: Permanent state of exception; Structural racism: Everyday Antigypsyism.



1. Introduction: Race, Antigypsyism and the Permanent State of Exception¹

In this article, I am using the metaphor of “the permanent State of exception” to discuss contemporary state politics that dehumanize the Roma. This metaphor allows me to centre the analysis on “the layered interconnectedness of political violence, racialization and the human” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 1) within the domain of modern politics, and, in particular, to describe the construction of Roma as almost humans or non-humans. Thus, Antigypsyism is deployed in the realm of “exception” and the Roma are constructed as a threat to the state. I draw on David T. Goldberg’s definition of racial threat to the “‘natural’ dominance, settled hierarchies and cultural superiority” (2009, p. 29). In other words, racial threat represents a fear of loss of power, dominance, and resources. Accordingly, I argue that the processes of racialisation and dehumanisation of the Roma have become necessary to the maintenance of whiteness and white supremacy.

I engage with Alexander Weheliye’s work, *Habeas Viscus* (2014), which according to Alana’s Lentin reading (2017), it is a call to see ‘race’ and, thus, the concept of the human. I consider that the analysis of Antigypsyism requires a focus on the racialization of Roma as a set of political relations and connections that aim to “discipline humanity into full humans, not quite-humans and nonhumans” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 3). This act of disciplining, though not biological, lays claim on attaching political hierarchies into human flesh, resulting in the classification of the Roma as non-political-beings thus, their bodies pose a permanent threat to the states and the regime of rights. Thus, Antigypsyism sanctions a “changing system of unequal power structures that apportion and delimit which humans can lay claim to full human status and which humans cannot” (*Ibid.*, p. 3).

The creation of modern societies – following the Fanonian definition as political spaces for the heteronormative white male subject of rights – demands a contractual relationship (Cf. Alves, 2018) between the states and their citizens. In this regard, then, the imagining of Roma people as not fully humans or as non-humans becomes

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ontological. In other words, the presence of racialized peoples or, in this case, the disturbing presence of Roma people within the nation becomes a central concern to the State read as a threat to its very existence as such. As Fanon argued:

The two zones [the white and the black worlds] are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity [...]. They both follow the principle of a reciprocal exclusivity. No conciliation is possible, for of the two terms, one is superfluous (Fanon, 2002, p. 39).

The sentiment expressed in the above quotation embodies what Jaime Amparo Alves has defined as a relationship of “ontological impossibilities” (2014, p. 12). Such ontological impossibility, marked by the notion of the (non)human is, in fact, an essential requirement to the making of the nation as a white imagined community. Accordingly, for Weheliye, the work of Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault dismiss the relevance of ‘race’ and racism as categories that have shaped the modern idea of human allowing bare life and biopolitics discourse “to imagine an indivisible biological substance anterior to racialization” (ibid., p. 4). Hence, he defines ‘race’ not as a biological classification but as set of processes, regimes and political relations that demand or structures that need for “the baring of non-white subjects from the category of the humans as it is performed in the modern west” (ibid., p. 3).

Accordingly, I argue that the common misinterpretation of Antigypsyism as connected to cultural or biological stereotypes prevents us from discussing it as a matter of socio-political organisations and excludes ‘race’ as a crucial category. In other words, any attempt to discuss Antigypsyism without critically engaging with the racializing classifications and the definition of the human qua whiteness, re-enacts a racializing violence (Cf. Lentin, 2017). In order to fully understand the mechanisms of racialization and containment of Roma people – spatially, politically and in any sense –, I propose to connect the notion of “bare life” with Fanon’s understanding of dehumanization. In particular, I propose to connect the dehumanization of Roma with what Fanon described as his experience as a black man:

I did not create a meaning for myself; the meaning was already there, waiting. It is not the wretched nigger, it is not with my nigger’s teeth, it is not as the hungry nigger that I fashion a torch to set the world alight; the torch was already there, waiting for this historic chance.” (Fanon, 2008, p. 102-103).

An understanding of Fanon’s quotation requires a historical analysis of ‘race’ and racism as ontological constructions independent of racialized bodies, lives and materiality. It is not race what creates racism, but racism that create race, or as Ruth Wilson Gilmore poses: [...] what then is racism if not



the political exploitation and (re)production of race? (apud Weheliye, 2014, p. 55).

One could argue that there is a long distance between the colonial context analysed by Fanon and the current situation of Roma people in Europe. However, a deep look into the dynamics and power relations enforced by whiteness will reveal fundamental shared connections between the Black and the Roma experience, both based on the fact of being constructed as an inferior alterity of the white man/woman. In other words, share the condition of being affected by the logics of the coloniality of power and its impact, exercised through renewed modern mechanisms.

In this sense, the constructed imaginary figure of the Roma² can also be read as closely related to what David T. Goldberg has described as the figure of the Muslim – “[...] the quintessential outsider, ordinarily strange in ways, habits, and ability to self-govern, aggressive, emotional, and conniving in contrast with the European’s urbanity, rationality, and spirituality” (2006, p. 344 -345). For Goldberg, the constructed imaginary figure of the Muslim is not the Muslim as an individual, nor as Muslim communities rather the idea of the Muslim that represents a threat to death, created by Europe’s paranoia and obsession for its own integrity (Ibid., p. 345 - 346). Thus, “He is a traditionalist, pre-modern, in the tradition of racial historicism difficult if not impossible to modernize, at least without ceasing to be ‘the Muslim’” (Ibid., p. 346). In other words, He, can easily be referred to the Muslim, the Roma, the Black that represents the idea of the Enemy for the modern world. Within this context as Sayyid describes in *A Fundamental Fear* (2015) the notion of Eurocentrism has arisen not only as a cultural or intellectual perspective, rather, and more worrying for him, the concept represents the condition of possibility engraved in the western colonial projects. Eurocentrism is, thus, an attempt of reinforcing white privileges.³

² I am using the term Roma both as a self-definition to identify ourselves and as a political category that deconstructs the white imaginary construction of the terms *Gypsy*, *Cigano*, *Gitano* or other expressions created by outsiders to try to define us.

³ The same idea of the *enemy* can be found in Gaia Giuliani’s analysis of *monstrosity* as a notion based on the opposition “*between internal/external, Self/Other, legitimate violence/ terror*” (2016, p. 4); she argues that these dichotomies have had an important role in constructing concepts and relations of authority, sovereignty and the State. Hence, as argued by Graham: “Monsters serve both to mark the fault-lines but also, subversively, to signal the fragility of...boundaries [between humans and almost-humans]. They are truly monstrous ...in their simultaneous demonstration and destabilization of the demarcations by which cultures have separated nature from artifice, human from non-human, normal from pathological” (Graham, 2002, p. 12).



In this article, I theorize the experience of the Roma people as racially marked bodies from the perspective of social and political power relations (Alves, 2014, 2018; Weheliye, 2014) that allow the reproduction of the divide between humans and non-humans and thus, of racialized violence. This article aims to conceptualize and theorize the processes of racialization/dehumanization of Roma, or the construction of the racial Other, through the analysis of the governmental rulings as modern politics that, as argued by Weheliye “[...] are neither exceptional nor comparable, but simply relational” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 37). Thus, Antigypsyism is naturalized and it has not been part of such theorizations because Roma are (un)seen as being in Europe but not from Europe, as the Muslim, so non-Western, an alien ‘race’. I argue that it is within the ‘permanent State of Exception’ that the justifiable and legitimized violence over the Roma body takes place, driven by its construction as racial Otherness/threat. This notion illustrates the creation of exceptional procedures of restriction, necessary control and discipline exercised in a regime of police States.

2. Amnesia, a Symptom of the West and the ideology of integration

The lack of attention given to the denial of Roma people’s humanity in the European context has led toward the continuous reproduction of Antigypsyism, or as the Roma scholar Ian Hancock argued (2009), the Roma community still confronts today a systematic crisis since the Holocaust, and unlike Anti-Semitism, Antigypsyism has never been questioned. It is not an exaggeration to say that the historical ambition of controlling Roma bodies that defined the relation between Roma and non-Roma during World War II has not disappeared, it just has changed its forms and sophistication. These modern ways of controlling the Roma bodies are only understandable as a new expression of the same spirit that pushed more than half millions of Roma to the gas chamber: The whiteness of Europe and its obsession with purity. This same will needs to create the idea of the ‘Gypsies’ as a stain in the modern European civilization, an impurity that threatens the ‘lives worthy to live and preserve’, this delusional fixation, nowadays, has got until the extreme cases of producing Roma deaths in prisons and practicing forced sterilization of Romani women. This kind of ideologies is what I will call



“The Roma Amnesia” that represents both, an act of colour-blinded racism and an act of remaining silent or remaining ignorant to the current existing Roma struggle in an Anti-Roma Europe. I follow Goldberg’s understanding of colour-blinded racism as “the claim of evaporation – the death – of race” (2009, p. 28). Such claim does not aim to end racial death, but rather “the end” represents a wishful disappearance of racism, “seeking to evade thus the violent and deadly ends, all those threats [...] in the service of which racism continue to be pressed into practice” (Goldberg, 2009, p. 28).

Drawing upon Goldberg’s statement: “Auschwitz is a failure of imagination” (2006, p. 337), it can be then stated that Antigypsyism becomes a living proof of the failed constructed idea of the Never Again argument, which was established after the Holocaust. In fact, in regard to the current anti-gypsy legislations, the promise of Never Again has become again and again. How can the Roma’s experience – in relation to the historical and current racial policy and legal measures implemented against them – be named in the context of Europe’s denial of ‘race’ (let’s not talk about race anymore), where the Roma, among other racialized people, are the faces of Europe’s racial other? The Eurocentric construction of ‘race’ builds political and historical obstacles under which bringing up issues on ‘race’ and racism, from one hand is almost impossible due to its “unspoken subtext” (Ibid., p. 335), and the creation of ‘race’ as a “lifestyle” allows certain justifications and legitimization. Due to this “unspoken subtext” (Goldberg, 2006) of the relationship between the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) and Antigypsyism, I agree and call upon Araujo and Maeso’s stress “on the need to bring the relationship between knowledge and power to the centre of disputes on national identity, cultural diversity and the validation of ‘other’ narratives” (2015, p. 3). The colonial past and its connection to the present under the form of coloniality is still a longstanding producer of racialization and dehumanization. This occurs when dehumanization achieves ideological normality, while at the same time, the practice of dehumanizing people produces racial categories on the other side of the abyssal line (Santos, 2007). Such articulations and invisibility not only provide forms of exclusion but indeed led to the conceptualization of Antigypsyism under the category of “social problems of the Roma” that need to be solved through “their integration and assimilation” or elimination.

In Racial Europeanization, Goldberg argues that it is not a matter of looking at ‘race’ or ‘racism’ as generalized concepts, rather, his suggestion invites us to discuss and



think on them from and within their embeddedness in relation to the socio-specific formations as for him racial rulings represents the multi racially oriented structures (2006, p. 334). In his further analysis of what has 'race' meant to Europe relating it to the Holocaust as "the defining event" (p. 336) that buried 'race' and racism, that is, the category of race has been rendered as having no political meaning, reduced to what he described as a "category ordering animal life" (ibid.) Such a process, as vividly claimed by Goldberg, has contributed to shortcomings on establishing a political debate on the strong connections between the construction of modern Europe and colonialism. In other words, it has led to the creation of a "historical amnesia" (Hall, 2000) not only within Europe's self-perception for its own legacy but also for its own values established under masks of democracy and human rights. In this sense, I argue that the lack of historical and political attention given to the persecution of the Roma as racially motivated, has resulted in legitimizing anti-Roma measures and unquestioning whiteness as Europe's identity. Antigypsyism has been actively silenced through the focus on "the Roma problem" or "the Roma as a problem", a notion of shifting the blame towards the Roma themselves for the situation they face in Europe (Csaba, 2017). This silencing does not exclusively affect Roma people, but all racialized communities. As discussed by Ryan (1976), this is an ideological phenomenon and a depraved procedure to blame the victim. In a similar venue, Sivanandan and Bourne (2016) have demonstrated how the British state power, law and policy are created in such a racist way that do not only fail to protect black lives from racist attacks, but they also lead to attempts of self-protection in which the victim becomes the perpetrator.

Thus, the concept of coloniality leads to formal and informal procedures of 'racial rule' that are regularly maintained by administrative forms (Cf. Hesse and Sayyid, 2006). This was the case on January 16, 2014, during the political crisis created in Europe by the deportation of Romanian and Bulgarian Roma orchestrated by the French Government and president Nicolas Sarkozy. In this context, the European Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, Viviane Reding, in declarations to Euronews, defined Roma people as "the problem to be solved":

We all know that we cannot solve the Roma situation in some weeks, in some months, but we really need dedication, not only from the member states, but also from the Roma communities to be willing to integrate and to be willing to have a normal way of living in the societies where they have



chosen to go to (...) to get children into school so that the next generation of Roma can live a normal life. (Sam Cel Roman, 2014, emphasis added)

Reding points out that the solution to the problems faced by European Roma lies with both the European states and the Roma communities. However, nothing is mentioned about the responsibility of these states, and the responsibility lies with the Roma and their will to integrate and adopt a “normal” way of living. This episode is just a small part of a bigger and pernicious mechanism that can be defined as ‘the ideology of integration’. This ideology, extremely present in Roma-related issues, is itself a product of structural Antigypsyism and a base of State legitimacy.

More than a century ago, in *The Souls of Black Folks*, W.E.B. Du Bois posed his famous question, a question still relevant when analysing the current situation of Roma people in Europe: “Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: Unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it: How does it feel to be a problem?” (Du Bois, 2007 [1903]). To fully understand the implications of this question, a prior interrogation needs to be addressed: how have we been created as a problem? A full answer is necessarily complex because it has many angles to analyse: from the semantic and social creation of a fictional narrative about the Roma, to the politically biased interests that seek to keep racialized people in a permanently subordinated position for the benefit of white people’s privileged position. In this case, the question will be narrowed to its relationship with the work developed by Roma and non-Roma governmental and non-governmental organizations based on human rights mainstream discourses. This has not only led to the depoliticization of the Roma struggle, but also the loss of strategical objectives for the Roma movement that has been seduced by the fictional idea that assumes it was actually possible to be “integrated” in Europe as the proper way to confront racism. However, as Lentin points out, integration discourse is just a way to hide racism: “There is no need for Europe to integrate into its outsiders. This is unnecessary because Europe stands for universal values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Under this trinity, there is no room for race” (Lentin, 2011, p. 15).

All these issues are the reasons why Antigypsyism cannot be understood as being a mere addition to the national and European political foundations, their frameworks and institutions, but rather as a structural element that shapes the current



political scenario. As the most tolerated form of racism in Europe (McGarry, 2017), Antigypsyism is the enabling element that allows all the circumstances and political torsions aforementioned. Thus, the projects of “integration”, “assimilation” flourish under such ideology follows an ideological purpose, what Maeso calls a “civilizing mission” – a way of “correcting a pathologised ‘way of being [Roma]” (Maeso, 2015, p. 60). Structural violence is thus legitimized when it is in the name of “saving the Roma from themselves”. I consider all those policies for “Roma Integration” as policies that have

reproduced Antigypsyism while aiming to “correct Roma way of being”, or as defined by Maeso (2015) “public policies and ‘active inclusion’ and ‘empowerment’ initiatives are therefore implemented as a civilising and disciplinary programme” (2015, p. 33). Following Maeso and Araújo’s analysis of notions such as “integration”, “cultural differences”:

The paradoxical nature of this situation is that the very same accusers that consider the Gypsies as “primitive”, “tribal”, culturally different, intrinsically nomadic, etc. [...] are those who state that “they should not have any special treatment. What the [Portuguese city] City Council must do for them is the same as they do for the whole community”. [...] If the Gypsies do not obey the same rules we do, they will never integrate!”, calling upon the “iron hand” of the State in order to accomplish an undifferentiated integration that would lead to assimilation, just in case the other Portuguese – Gypsy-phobic – would be spontaneously ready to accept this, and the iron hand of the state would not be needed to buffer their explicit racism or, to be more precise, a racism coded as an interest in universal democratic citizenship [...].(Maeso; Araújo, 2011, p. 31)

The notion of integration is constructed as a “civilizing mission” that excludes the state from any responsibility to question its own structures, in opposite, it contributes to maintaining its whiteness (Maeso, 2015). Thus, racism is manufactured through a continuum “ontologisation of the Roma/Gypsies as ‘pathological’ subjects, this being the structural condition addressed by public policies” (Maeso; Araújo, 2011, p. 50).

What is left to be done? How can we, Roma people, rethink concepts as “political identity”, “integration”, “assimilation”, when we are trapped inside those categories from the oppressor’s view? Can we be saved from the inner monster that the civilized Europe created out of us? Can we rethink our approach to what Grada Kilomba (2016) called “the involvement with the white world” and discuss/tackle Antigypsyism



started and followed by our own situated knowledge and experience and get rid of the white saviour who speaks for us as stated by Araújo and Brito: “Roma communities are not expected to speak for themselves but to be explained by the owners of knowledge and power” (2018, p. 4)? Will it be worthy to do all that in a white world where, recalling Spivak’s question, the issue is not if the Roma as subaltern can speak, but if white people can listen. Can we follow Weheliye’s proposal to think about the human beyond the state and the law, and therefore white sovereignty. In other words, can we think about humanity from the experiences of those the liberal law has excluded and to think humanity beyond and against inclusion into the state, the law, rights?

3. **Everyday Antigypsyism**

My struggle to think Roma people’s life within such racialized systems of categories also conditions my intimate brutal experience as a Roma woman with Europe’s police forces. This experience resembles what Alves has described as “the struggle to secure a place in an anti-black city” (2018, p. 1). My identity as a Roma woman was shaped by the values I followed once: the anti-black and anti-Roma city’s “democratic ideas” were part of my educational and political life. The wounds caused by the daily traumatic actions against me and the bodies of fourteen million Roma are still in a healing process, but it never seems to find the correct medicine. No matter how much we do – we abandon our language; we forget our Romanipen; we forget our history – in an attempt to finally “become real Europeans”, or what Fanon defined as the process of “becoming a true human being” (2008, p.2), we never seem to succeed. This traumatic experience of Roma people does not differ too much from the experiences described by Grada Kilomba in her work *Plantation Memories: Episodes of Everyday Racism* (2016), which is a compilation of episodes exploring everyday racism as a psychological reality of the Black subject.

In this sense, Antigypsyism – as a form and a product of racism – is the brutal, vicious reality of Roma people. This reality is experienced not only by the Roma people, but rather by everyone who felt racism in their own skin. As Essed has argued: “the notion of everyday [...] refers to a familiar world, a world of practices we are socialized



with in order to manage in the system” (1991, p. 3). In the remainder of this section, I offer theoretical insight to Anti-Roma Europe through the analysis of everyday experiences of Roma people. In order to identify a sort of script of Antigypsyism, everyday racism and structural violence, I start by analysing and theorising Roma’s everyday experiences with the white world/white institutions. I have chosen to engage with the specific experiences presented in the documentary entitled *The Love and The Wrath, Cartography of Anti-gypsy Harassment*⁴ and directed by José Heredia and Manuel Maciá, jointly with other documentary resources. The documentary gathers the lived experiences of Roma men and women living in Los Palmerales, a Roma urban ghetto in the city of Elche (Spain). They share their experiences of systematic harassment by the police, social pestering, school segregation, stigmatization by the media and labour market discrimination.

3.1 Race, Space, and Antigypsyism

“When you go to ask for a job, all good. When you say that you come from Los Palmerales...ah we will come another day, we will call you, leave us your phone” (Juan’s testimony; in Heredia, 2015, 7.37 – 7.45 minutes, my translation).

These are Juan’s words, a Roma man who shares his individual and collective experience of racism starting with spatial ghettoization and its politics of racial characterization. Such spatial characterization occurs when a group of people is placed to live in a ghetto, and this spatial isolation becomes one of the factors of racial identification. This isolation, what Kilomba calls “illusory separate country” (2016, p. 66), shows the white necessity to imagine two different separated worlds. Juan’s experience and the lived experience of Roma people in Los Palmerales is telling of the experience of the Roma and most racialized peoples that live outside the space of whiteness, and their national cultures. This space of the racialised ghetto became their first characterization and identification, drawing a clear boundary between “our” and “their” territory that has been built upon the relation between ‘race’, identity and space (Cf. Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). This intersection is formed by hierarchical power relations through which “space achieves a distinctive identity as a place” (ibid. p. 8). The connection

⁴ The full video can be accessed in the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsWcYE3De0A&t=385s>



between geography and racialization is, thus, vital to recognizing the circumstances under which “race” and, in this case, Antigypsyism is necessary to the production of space. In this sense, through spatial racialization, the construction of Roma as “outsiders” also creates a naturalization of their difference and classification as bodies that do not belong to those spaces, or as bodies outside the place.

As Gupta and Ferguson explain, “the identity of a place emerge by the intersection of its specific involvement in a system of hierarchically organized spaces with its cultural construction as a community or locality” (1992, p. 8). Based on my own experience as a Roma who comes from Shuto Orizari, in the city of Skopje (Macedonia), the only Roma municipality officially recognized as such in Europe, I argue that the construction of a ghetto has also a fundamental role in forming Roma identities that are not always real, rather are formed and performed based on the opportunities, limitations and politics given by the space or locality itself.

Juan’s experience is shared by his neighbours in Los Palmerales. For instance, Santiago’s testimony links the politics of the urban space to the identification of “race”: “Yes, when they realize [because we come from Los Palmerales] that we are Roma, that gives them the creeps” - Santiago, 7.50 – 7.52 minutes. (Heredia, 2015, my translation). The characterization of communities and localities as socially and, more importantly, racially distinct places make Roma people to be constantly deconstructing the idea of “imagined spaces” and “imagined communities”, so that they can first recognize himself/herself without having to ask “what do they [white people] see” (Cf. Kilomba, 2016, p. 67).

3.2. The struggle for survival

It has been argued in different reports and academic articles, such as the book *Roma in an Expanding Europe: Breaking the Poverty Cycle*, that poverty among Roma in Central and Eastern Europe is one of the most shocking issues since the “transition” from socialism started in 1989 (Ringold Orenstein; Wilkens, 2005). The Roma are, thus, categorized as a “prominent poverty risk group” (ibid., p. xiv). While I was listening to the story of Daniel – a Roma man from Romania who, due to extreme poverty, migrated to Italy and was living in a camp in Bari, where he was applying for asylum– I felt not



only the intimacy of his words and emotions, but also an emotional trauma, from both sides, his as a storyteller, and mine, as a story listener:

As Romania became a democracy, we gypsies thought we were stronger. This kind of democracy was bad. You know how I almost starved to death? Imagine you give someone a tray full of food and he is so hungry that he would eat everything, and leave absolutely nothing for the others. So were the Romanians, they were poor, they were sad, embittered, hungry. And we as gypsies had absolutely no rights. This thing caused hatred between us. So that we began to go away to other countries, in order to work and to beg at the traffic lights. Some of us steal, other make pots. Everybody does what he can, to survive (Daniel in Documentary Educational Resources, 2003, Japigia Gagi, 2.34 – 3.53 minutes).

“Everybody does what he can, to survive!” This needs to be told! This needs to be heard! “These are not [...] intimate complaints, but rather accounts of racism” (Kilomba, 2016, p. 30). This is Antigypsyism! The memories of hunger, exclusion, marginalization, extermination, etc., are traumatic events in the progression of the personal life story or even toward the past of the collective. In this regard, as argued by Katz, (2013), memory work is narrative. The memory of the past, the memory of the history of race and racism is what Fanon reveals with higher solidity than any other scholar or writer; he argues that the act of remembering is never a silent act of self-analysis, instead, it is a hurting act of remembering, a performance of putting together pieces of past in order to make sense of the present trauma. It is not only a single event that causes trauma, but, rather, repeated multiplied traumas: “the latest at the beginning and the earliest at the end; it was impossible to make one’s way back to the first trauma, which is often the most forceful, if one skipped any of its successors” (Fanon, 2008, p. 111); “Unfortunately, the Roma have been mistreated for 500 years” – Santiago says (Heredia, 2015 9.49 – 9.50 minutes, my translation).

3.3 The innocent – I am just a kid like him

“What is most painful about racism to me is to see a Roma child playing with a non-Roma child and the non-Roma child’s mother coming and saying to his kid: don’t play with that Roma. Why all of that? That is because of the adults. The adults instill racism into the kids” (Conversation among Romani women in Heredia, 2015, 10.12 – 10.17 minutes, my translation)

“Very often the kids ask us: Mum, dad, why won’t she let me play with her son? I am just a kid like him” (ibid., 10.53 – 10.54 minutes, my translation).



The child is not yet aware of how he is already constructed as a racialized Other. In his innocent child's mind, he is just a kid like him. The false notion of being like the white! To what will this rejection lead? Lack of self-esteem? Constant permission in the white man's eyes? Can we leave the fascination for the white men, as Houria Bouteldja suggests (2017, p. 107)?

A few years ago, I met a Roma child in Spain and I asked him what he wants to be when he grows up. He answered: 'I do not know what I want to be, but I know what I don't want to be. I don't want to be a Roma!' I saw the disappointment in his eyes. Sadly, painfully, worrying enough, his response did not shock me! His sense of belonging is damaged! He is "the (racial) Other":

To be "the Other" is to always feel in an uncomfortable position, to be on one's guard, to be prepared to be rejected and . . . unconsciously do everything that's needed to bring about the anticipated catastrophe. One cannot overestimate the intense pain that accompanies such conditions of abandonment, a suffering that can be attributed to the initial experiences of exclusion in childhood and makes the individual relive them particularly vividly (Germaine Guex, *La Névrose d'abandon* apud Fanon, 2008, p. 57).

3.4. The multiple meanings of 'Oh but you are not like them'

I recall my days during my bachelor degree in the mainstream University in Skopje, up until today, from the non-Roma people I keep hearing "Oh but you are not like them", meaning "you are not like the Roma" or "You do not look like a Roma". But I am Roma. The white ideological perception about how Roma look like or who they are is what I also call everyday racism. Within their racist, stereotypical construction of Roma I, as a Romani woman could not be "that same Roma" because I spoke the Macedonian language good enough as they did, or because of whatever other presumptions within their vision about the Roma people. This means that:

1. You are not like them implies that someone like "them", "the Other", cannot be/speak as good as they are/do.
2. You don't look like Roma is also an act of being questioned and told that my Romanipen is not significant – "[the] process of invisibilizing the visible" (Kilomba, 2016, p. 92).



3. It is an act/performance of denial, as the white have to deal and accept the presence of Otherness in their circle.
4. Because I do not fulfil their stereotypical expectations about being a Roma, it does not mean that I am white nor does it mean that I am one of them. It is always them, the white who has the power to define, to frame, to construct, to control, to question (Kilomba, 2016, p. 66). Those heterarchical positions were always there and they will always be, hence, those phrases also mean that
5. You are with us just because you are not too Roma.

These everyday experiences and struggles cannot be seen and understood as matters of stereotypes or prejudices, but as part of an institutional/structural order of domination (Cf. Grosfoguel, 2016). Accordingly, discussing racism needs to challenge the “reductionisms of many existing definitions” (ibid. p. 10). Kilomba argues that “it is worth looking at individual experiences and subjective accounts of everyday racism in order to understand the collective and historical memory” (p. 49). Having said this, one of the reasons why I share this experience is that I, as a Romani woman, writes from the Roma ghetto experience, not from the mainstream.... that same ghetto from where I am theorizing my own life experience and producing knowledge.

Concluding remarks

In this article I have discussed Antigypsyism as a sort of “permanent state of exception” within the legacies of European colonialty/modernity. In other words, I argued that Antigypsyism is deployed in the realm of “exception” and the Roma are constructed as a threat to the state. Thus, Antigypsyism become the legitimized element of State’s power, control and disciplinarian ideology. The social and political construction of the Roma bodies as “naturally prone to criminality” hence, as a specific threat to the white order, have placed the Roma body as a body that needs to be constantly “integrated”, “corrected”, observed/controlled. Drawing on this, I argue that Antigypsyism/anti-blackness are the condition of possibility of the normalized, civilized, unmarked, unracialized, white human.

The paradox of Roma in Europe today could be described as what Alves describes as “the double negation” or the notion of “neither human nor citizen” (2014,



p. 2). In this sense, I have aimed to demonstrate the difficulties to articulate and conceptualize Roma's experience within the Anti-Roma Europe manifested through the masks of democracy and human rights. I argued that the challenge for Roma in relation to human rights is not to "be included in the universal" notion of human rights, but, rather, to challenge the creation of human rights after the Second World War under the ideal "we are all equal" that silences the deep impact of racism. The main challenge is to "take away the imperial/colonial idea of what it means to be human. This is a case, precisely, in which the assault to the imperality of modern/colonial loci of enunciations (disciplines and institutions) is called into question" (MIGNOLO, 2006, p. 165).

To acknowledge the "double negation" of Roma lives requires to question not only Antigypsyism itself, but also the conceptual framework where this form of racism is tackled and discussed. This means to challenge the limitations imposed by the 'white innocence' narratives that nowadays are very much interested in framing Antigypsyism as an expression of the past and break any direct connection between the Porrajmos and the current, daily and highly tolerated Antigypsyism. This has animated the banishing of structural racism in the analysis of contemporary Roma realities. This biased conceptual framework needs to be understood as a complicit strategy of European "white innocence" in order to normalize the racist system of domination exercised upon the Roma people. In this sense, this "last acceptable form of racism" McGarry (2017) has become a big interrogation that questions the ideology behind the vainglorious notion of the rule of law and the self-celebratory discourse of human rights at the heart of the continent that proudly presents itself as the founder of democracy and human rights.

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